



Chambers Of  
Virginia A. Phillips  
Chief United States District Judge

United States District Court  
Central District Of California  
United States Courthouse  
350 West 1st Street, Suite 4311  
Los Angeles, California 90012-4565

Telephone  
(213) 894-2975

October 29, 2019

Via Electronic and U.S. Mail

Mr. Pat Cipollone  
White House Counsel  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Chairman, Judiciary Committee  
United States Senate  
290 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
Ranking Member, Judiciary Committee  
United States Senate  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kamala Harris  
Member, Judiciary Committee  
United States Senate  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Judicial Vacancies in the Central District of California

Dear Mr. Cipollone, Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Senator Harris:

As Chief Judge of the Central District of California, one of the largest and busiest federal trial courts in the United States, I write to you about a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Nearly one-third of our authorized judgeships sit vacant; some have been vacant for over five years. I implore the Senate to act on the nominations of the six men and women nominated for district judgeships here, the President to nominate candidates to fill the three additional vacancies, and the Senate, again, to act on those nominations without delay.

The Central District serves more than 19 million people, and is vast in size, covering seven counties in Southern California. To serve the people of our sprawling and populous district, Congress has authorized 28 judgeships, 27 permanent and one temporary. The Judicial Council of the United States repeatedly has recommended the creation of additional judicial positions (ten, in March 2019) based on the volume of cases filed here. In the five years since the last new judge joined our Court, the number of vacancies has climbed to an alarming high, while the caseload has increased more than twenty percent.

As a result, each of the active district judges on our Court has a weighted caseload of 986 civil cases – nearly double the national average. And this number does not include the criminal caseload carried by each judge, which in our district often includes cases of 50, 60 or even 90 indicted defendants. As alarming as this is, the situation may well worsen. Many of the active district judges on the Court who are eligible to retire continue to serve, despite the ever growing workload. If all of them chose to retire, only eleven active judges would remain, putting at grave risk our Court's ability to serve the millions of people in the Central District.

I am aware, of course, and appreciate that the President has nominated six candidates and announced his intent to nominate another two very soon. Three of those judicial nominees were renominated in February after their nominations in 2018 lapsed at the end of the Congressional term, and still no hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the nominations have been scheduled. Neither I nor anyone on our court intends to endorse a specific nominee or to encroach on the Senate's constitutional role of advice and consent. Rather, I write to draw your attention to the grave danger these vacancies pose to our Court's ability to serve justice in a timely and judicious manner.

Please contact me if I can give you any further information, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Virginia A. Phillips  
Chief United States District Judge

Cc: Honorable Sidney Thomas (*via Electronic Mail and U.S. Mail*)  
Chief Judge, United States Court of Appeals  
James C. Duff (*via Electronic Mail and U.S. Mail*)  
Director